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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 08/18/09

INDEX:

- (1) 2009 Lower House election: Party-heads debate at Japan National Press Club; Foreign and security policies a source of trouble for DPJ's plan to form a coalition government with SDP and PNP (Nikkei)
- (2) Three opposition parties' fragile unity (Asahi)
- (3) LDP, DPJ give consideration to small-scale farmers in agricultural policies in manifestos (Yomiuri)
- (4) Yasukuni: a nonissue in this election summer (Asahi)
- (5) Okinawa Governor: Temporary transfer of helicopter unit should be studied to remove danger of "Futenma" (Ryukyu Shimpo)
- (6) Q&A of Governor Nakaima's News Conference on August: 14: "Improper to give any assessment of political pledges" (Ryukyu Shimpo)
- (7) Governor says he will honor pledge to close Futenma Air Station in three years (Okinawa Times)
- (8) DPJ President Hatoyama: Futenma Air Station should at least be transferred to outside Okinawa (Okinawa Times)

ARTICLES:

- (1) 2009 Lower House election: Party-heads debate at Japan National Press Club; Foreign and security policies a source of trouble for DPJ's plan to form a coalition government with SDP and PNP

NIKKEI (Page 3) (Abridged slightly)
August 18, 2009

The Japan National Press Club hosted a debate yesterday of the heads of major political parties ahead of the official announcement of the Aug. 30 House of Representatives election. Heated debate took place

on foreign and security policies and economic stimulus measures that are vital for running the government. The debate exposed gaps in security and other policies between the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the People's New Party (PNP) that have been looking for ways to launch a coalition administration. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the DPJ also clashed fiercely over the question of hiking the consumption tax rate in order to increase revenues.

If the DPJ wins the upcoming Lower House election, it plans to try to form a coalition government with the SDP and the PNP. In such a case, foreign and security policies are likely to become a source of trouble. These policies are not mentioned in the common policies announced by the three parties on Aug. 14.

Refueling operations

The debates uncovered the fundamental differences in the positions of the DPJ and the SDP over the modalities of the overseas dispatch of Self-Defense Forces (SDF). DPJ President Yukio Hatoyama indicated that it is best for the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) to combat piracy in waters off Somalia. At the same time, Hatoyama said, "We have condoned the deployment of SDF vessels in the judgment that such (dispatch of the JCG) is not pragmatic."

SDP head Mizuho Fukushima raised an objection outright, saying: "We are opposed to the dispatch of SDF. The JCG must play the main role."

The DPJ and the SDP were also at loggerheads on the Maritime

TOKYO 00001906 002 OF 007

Self-Defense Force's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean, which is to expire next January. Hatoyama reiterated his party's basic stance of not allowing a simple extension of the mission, adding, "Our party will probably not be able to order an MSDF withdrawal immediately after we take power, and I would like to ask for your understanding on that." Fukushima insisted on immediate withdrawal.

Some foreign and security issues are likely to become hindrances to talks between the DPJ and other opposition parties, such as the SDP, on forming a coalition government. There was also a scene in which Hatoyama made a concession to Fukushima.

Asked by Fukushima about the DPJ's view on the maintenance and legislation of the three non-nuclear principles, Hatoyama said: "We will uphold the three non-nuclear principles. We thought that the three principles would be more effective if they were left as a national policy, but we would like to consider the option of legislating them in the process of cooperating with the SDP."

Watanuki plays up presence of PNP

Although the DPJ and the PNP did not expose any major gaps over foreign and security policies, they were out of tune regarding some other issues.

Hatoyama, for instance, reiterated his stock argument that the country needs a national memorial for paying respects to the war dead. This provoked a strong reaction from PNP Representative Tamisuke Watanuki.

Watanuki asked Prime Minister Taro Aso and DPJ President Hatoyama about where they stand on the question of granting local voting rights to permanent foreign residents. Aso replied that the LDP does not entirely subscribe to the view that local voting rights should be granted immediately to permanent foreign residents. Hatoyama replied: "There are pros and cons. We are trying to unify our views, but I think the time has come to consider the matter more positively."

If the SDP and the PNP become overly assertive in order to avoid being overshadowed by the two major parties, that might take a toll on solidarity among the DPJ, SDP, and PNP.

(2) Three opposition parties' fragile unity

ASAHI (Page 2) (Abridged)
August 15, 2009

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Social Democratic Party (SDP), and People's New Party (PNP) - opposition parties - finally devised a set of common campaign pledges for the upcoming House of Representatives election. The three parties played up their unity during prior consultations on a possible coalition government, but gaps in their perspectives were evident. Because they put off including in the common campaign pledges such key policies as foreign and security policy over which the gulf between them is wide, there remains cause for concern ahead of consultations on the formation of a coalition government after the Lower House election.

DPJ Policy Research Committee Chairman Masayuki Naoshima proudly said at a joint press conference on Aug. 14:

TOKYO 00001906 003 OF 007

"The biggest issue in the upcoming election is a change of government. Since we will make efforts to implement common policies, it is all right to interpret these as pledges by the three parties."

Masamichi Kondo, deputy policy chief of the SDP, and Shozaburo Jimi, PNP policy chief, attended the press conference.

The three parties began policy consultations on making common pledges in late July at the request of the DPJ, which envisions the formation of a coalition government with the SDP and PNP. For the DPJ, which does not hold a majority in the House of Councillors, even if it wins a single-party majority in the Lower House, it will be indispensable for it to form a coalition with the two parties. The policy consultations were meant as "a rehearsal" for working out details on campaign pledges before the general election.

However, the policy consultations remained bumpy. The SDP was reluctant to hold consultations. Many in the SDP, mainly in local chapters, are wary of participating in a coalition government. It was necessary for the DPJ to say repeatedly that the consultations were not for forming a coalition government.

As a result, the three parties were able to reach an agreement by obfuscating the nature of the "common pledges" under the rubric of "common policies." When asked by reporters whether the common policies are pledges or the adjustment of policies, DPJ Secretary General Katsuya Okada said on August 13, "We mean that we will fight to win our seats in the Lower House election based on common ways of thinking. They are not preconditions for forming a coalition government."

The DPJ was on tenterhooks over SDP and PNP requests for specifics. The DPJ and SDP quickly agreed to include a pledge to strengthen employment measures and a drastic review of postal services -- their showcase policies -- but they did not quickly find common ground on other issues.

A pledge to leave the consumption tax rate alone, which is stipulated in the manifestos of the SDP and PNP, was ranked number one in the list of common policy items in a bid to highlight "a complete difference from the LDP-New Komeito common policies," according to SDP deputy policy chief Kondo. This item is not included in the DPJ's manifesto, however. A policy of giving small- and medium-size companies extensions on repayment of loans was included in the common campaign pledges at the urging of the PNP. It was not originally included in the DPJ's manifesto.

(3) LDP, DPJ give consideration to small-scale farmers in agricultural policies in manifestos

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Full)
August 17, 2009

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) have underscored their consideration to small-scale farmers in

their policy platforms (manifestos) for the upcoming House of Representatives election. The key to winning a national election lies in how many farm votes a political party can secure. It is also necessary, however, to help domestic farmers become strong enough to survive in a liberalized market.

TOKYO 00001906 004 OF 007

LDP encourages acreage reduction, crop diversification

In a bid to promote the policy of reducing the acreage under rice cultivation, the LDP in its manifesto proposes making utmost use of paddy fields by significantly raising subsidies for the production of wheat, soybeans, and rice for animal feed. Reflecting the current state of the growing rice glut, the party aims to boost the production of grains such as wheat and soybeans while reducing rice production.

The LDP also vows to raise the rate of food self-sufficiency from the current 41% to 50% by making full use of paddy fields.

The manifesto specifies: "The government will offer assistance to all highly-motivated farmers while scrapping such conditions as the size and age of land." With this statement, the party underscored its consideration for small-scale farmers. In 2005, farmers' incomes decreased by half to 3.4 trillion yen compared with 15 years before. Bearing this in mind, the party vows to increase farmers' incomes but gives no specific numerical target.

DPJ pledges to introduce income indemnity to all farmers

The DPJ's agriculture policy in its manifesto features an income indemnity system for individual farmers. The party proposes setting targeted production amounts for a variety of farm products, such as wheat, soybeans, and rice for animal feed, besides rice as a staple food, and allocating such amounts to individual farmers. The manifesto pledges to also pay income indemnity to farmers who produce more than the targeted amounts of products besides rice that are in short supply. The LDP is aiming to achieve self-sufficiency for all major grain products by encouraging farmers grow more soybeans, wheat, and other key grain with income indemnity.

Regarding the objective of the income indemnity system, the manifesto notes: "This will make it possible for all farmers, including small-scale farmers, to continue to be engaged in farming," demonstrating its consideration for small-scale farmers. The party also vows to provide an extra subsidy for farmers eager to integrate farmland or to grow products organically, but the amount of the subsidy to be offered remains unclear.

(4) Yasukuni: a nonissue in this election summer

ASAHI (Page1) (Abridged)
August 15, 2009

With the next general election approaching, Japan marks the 64th anniversary of the end of World War II today. The heads of the two major political parties have announced their intentions not to visit Yasukuni Shrine, and only one cabinet minister has declared that she would pay homage at the controversial Shinto shrine on this anniversary. Contrary to all the fuss during the Koizumi administration, Yasukuni Shrine has not escalated into a point at dispute. Regardless of the results of the election, the shrine is likely to remain a nonissue for some time.

Ahead of attending a government-sponsored memorial ceremony for the war dead for the first time as prime minister, Taro Aso indicated that he would visit the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery but would not pay homage at Yasukuni. "I think it is wrong to use those who

TOKYO 00001906 005 OF 007

sacrificed themselves for the country as a political bargaining chip, for election campaigning, or for newspaper headlines," he told

the press corps. "Yasukuni should be kept far away from all the fuss."

Before Aso became prime minister, he used to visit the shrine about once a year. But since taking office, he has presented in the prime minister's name a potted masakaki -- an offering of branches of the masaki evergreen tree considered sacred in Shinto -- to Yasukuni on its spring and fall festivals.

Aso formulated his thinking on the Yasukuni issue in the closing days of the Koizumi administration. The August 8, 2006, edition of the Asahi Shimbun carried an article by Aso calling for the secular incorporation of Yasukuni Shrine, as well as for special legislation to establish a national memorial for paying respect to the war dead.

A week later, then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited the shrine to fulfill his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) presidential election pledge of visiting there on the end-of-the-war anniversary. The LDP presidential election to determine Koizumi's successor took place in the following month.

DPJ calls for a new facility

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Yukio Hatoyama, too, visited the shrine on Aug. 15, 1992. But when Yasukuni escalated into a political issue around August 2001, Hatoyama, who was also serving as DPJ head at the time, urged Prime Minister Koizumi and other cabinet ministers to refrain from visiting in their official capacities the controversial Shinto shrine by pointing out two facts: (1) Class-A war criminals are enshrined at Yasukuni, and (2) an effort must be made to build a new secular national memorial for the war dead. These two facts are reflected in the DPJ's policy index for 2009. Although the DPJ, too, calls for a national memorial, its plan fundamentally differs from Aso's in that his dwells on the existence of Yasukuni.

After becoming DPJ President in May, Hatoyama told China that he will not visit Yasukuni if he becomes prime minister. At a press conference on Aug. 11, Hatoyama announced a policy that the prime minister and other cabinet ministers will refrain from paying homage at Yasukuni under a Hatoyama administration. This elicited from the Chinese Foreign Ministry a statement welcoming Hatoyama's remarks. The DPJ has taken a preparatory step for smooth diplomacy toward East Asia.

(5) Okinawa Governor: Temporary transfer of helicopter unit should be studied to remove danger of "Futenma"

Ryukyu Shimpō
August 15, 2009 page 2

At a regular news conference on August 14, Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima commented on the fifth anniversary of the crash of a U.S. military helicopter into (a building at) Okinawa International University on August 13. "I have been saying that it (Futenma Air Station) symbolizes danger and should be closed within three years," he said. "That was the fundamental standpoint and symbol of my platform then (in 2006). I have requested a study for reducing operations including the temporary transfer of the helicopter unit

TOKYO 00001906 006 OF 007

until the relocation (of Futenma Air Station) is completed. I think the request is gaining gradual acceptance." Thus he stressed that removal of danger by such measures as the transfer of a unit should be examined.

Nakaima said that the Democratic Party of Japan's proposal to relocate Futenma Air Station outside Okinawa Prefecture or outside Japan "needs to be confirmed after the election." Thus he indicated that if the Democratic Party of Japan takes power, he will confirm the government's policy after the election.

Nakaima commented that "local residents' opinion should be respected" regarding the U.S. Army's new firing range, scheduled for completion near Camp Hansen's (firing) Range 3 at the end of

September. Local residents have requested cancellation of construction.

(6) Q&A of Governor Nakaima's News Conference on August: 14:
"Improper to give any assessment of political pledges"

Ryukyu Shimpo (Slightly abridged)
August 15, 2009 Page 2

Q: What is your assessment of political parties' manifestos (campaign pledges)?

A: At present these manifestos do not clearly explain how and at what pace they want to achieve decentralization (of power from central government to local governments), so it is improper to make an assessment now. The Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito did not comment on the revision of the Status of Forces Agreement. The Democratic Party of Japan's manifesto used the expression, "will propose," but I do not know if the party will make efforts to achieve the revision or if it will just end up making a proposal. I would like to confirm that after the election. Each political party and parliamentary group has various ideas. It is nothing more or less than a campaign pledge.

Q: Five years have passed since a U.S. helicopter crashed into (a building at) Okinawa International University.

A: I have requested that operations at the Futenma Air Station should be scaled back and the facility nearly closed between now and the relocation. A council (on relocation) set up a working team to study the elimination of danger and reduction of noise. It is a half-step forward. I made a request to the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense and have asked the Japanese Government many times. I think they have finally begun to understand the importance of this.

Q: What is the target date of three years to bring (Futenma Air Station) to a condition close to closure?

A: My term of office is four years, so I will (achieve a condition of closure) within four years.

(7) Governor says he will honor pledge to close Futenma Air Station in three years

Okinawa Times (page 2) (full)
August 15, 2009

At a regular news conference held on the morning of August 14,

TOKYO 00001906 007 OF 007

Governor Hirokazu Nakaima commented on the target to bring the U.S. military's Futenma Air Station to a condition of closure "within three years." "I have a counterpart to negotiate with," he said, "so I would like people to understand the three-year target literally as a 'target.' In any case, I would like to (achieve) the elimination of danger before my term ends."

Regarding the feasibility of the temporary transfer of units and the dispersal of training to different areas, which the Okinawa Prefectural Government has requested of the Japanese and U.S. governments, Nakaima said, "I do not know how many years it would take to complete the transfer (to Henoko), but a request to reduce operations (at Futenma Air Station) until the relocation is completed is reasonable and realistic."

Nakaima referred to a working team that the Council on the Relocation of Futenma Air Station established last year to eliminate danger (and reduce noise). "Establishment of a team to study a drastic reduction of noise was a half step forward," he said. "I understand the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense and the Japanese Government have come to be aware of the importance (of this)."

Nakaima talked about political parties' manifestos (campaign pledges) released ahead of the public announcement of the general election on August 18. "I give them high marks for clarity of expression. However, the political parties have so many different

ideas on decentralization that I don't think it would be proper to give an assessment."

Nakaima also touched on the revision of the Status of Forces Agreement "What does the Democratic Party of Japan mean by 'will propose (its revision)' "? he asked. "I think I will have the chance to ask some day. I would like to confirm (the manifestos) after the election."

(8) DPJ President Hatoyama: Futenma Air Station should at least be transferred to outside Okinawa

Okinawa Times (Page 3) (Full)
August 18 2009

Tokyo - During an open debate by leaders of six political parties held on August 17, Democratic Party of Japan President Yukio Hatoyama commented on relocation of the U.S. military's Futenma Air Station. He said: "The most desirable plan is to transfer (Futenma Air Station) overseas, but I think we can at least expect to transfer (Futenma Air Station) to outside Okinawa Prefecture."

Hatoyama then said: "We cannot negotiate (this issue) right after taking power and resolve it right away. I want to draw a final conclusion after I fully understand the feelings of the Okinawa Governor as well as the Okinawan people, and conduct a comprehensive review."

ZUMWALT